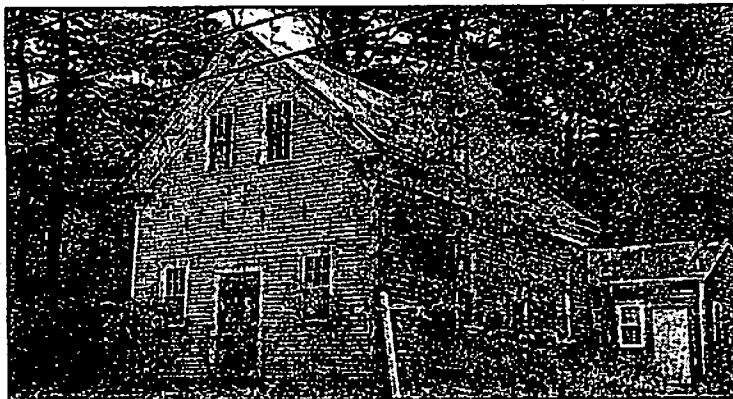


Grange Hall and Abandoned Fire House to Become Affordable Housing ✓

By SUSANNA SHEEHAN

Town Meeting voters will be asked to spend \$70,000 to purchase the historic Grange hall building on Franklin Street in order to combine it with an adjacent town-owned abandoned fire house to make two new affordable homes.

The Local Housing Partnership is sponsoring this article with the Community Preservation Committee. The housing committee has been working on this article for the past three years.



The Local Housing Partnership and the Community Preservation Committee are sponsoring a Town Meeting article for the purchase of the old Grange building in order to convert it to affordable housing.

The old Grange hall sits on .13 acres. It is situated next to an old firehouse that used to house the Duxbury Art Association. Both buildings are run down and in need of repair and renovation, but both are historic buildings. The plan is to renovate them into single-family homes with a shared-septic system, since both are on sub-standard lots and neither has enough land for an updated system.

The price of the Grange hall is \$50,000 and the town has a signed purchase and sales agreement with the Grange's owners. The additional \$20,000 will cover legal fees and other expenses related to the purchase.

According to Brendan Keohan of the Local Housing Partnership, the town will not do the rehab work. Instead, the committee has solicited bids for renovating the buildings into residences.

"Habitat for Humanity leads the pack," said Keohan.

The committee wants to keep the exterior look of the buildings and have a builder create a one-bedroom home in the fire station and carve a three-bedroom home out of the large Grange hall. Bids will be judged on the most creative use of the spaces, said Local Housing Partnership chairman Diane Bartlett.

The buildings will be for home ownership, not rentals, said Keohan.

According to Town Planner

Christine Stickney, the town appropriated \$600 for the firehouse in the early 1900s. It has sat unused for years.

Lynne Devnew said the Duxbury Historical Commission supports the project as long as the structures can maintain their general appearance.

In related business, selectmen discussed four other articles related to affordable housing that the Local Housing Partnership is bringing to Town Meeting.

The Local Housing Assistance Program is a proposal to offer first-time homebuyers who qualify for affordable housing a second mortgage to bring down the price of an existing home in Duxbury to an affordable level. The "buy-down" program would close the gap between what a person could afford for a mortgage and the price of the house. As part of the program, the house would have to remain affordable and be sold to another eligible buyer.

Funding for the program would come from the Community Preservation Act fund. The Local Housing Partnership is seeking \$500,000 to begin the program.

While selectmen acknowledged the advantages of the program, such as preserving existing homes in town instead of using open space to build more, and preventing demolitions that resulted in McMansions, they questioned

the committee about the legal documents related to the program. They also worried that these homes would not be included by the state as part of Duxbury's entire affordable housing count. Also, they were concerned about the costs to administer the program and whether or not residents in this program could continue if the home needed major repairs. They decided not to vote on the article until they received more information regarding the legal documents that went with the program.

Selectmen also postponed a vote on an article to establish an Affordable Housing Trust and an allocation plan for the Affordable Housing Trust.

The trust would be a legal entity consisting of five trustees serving for two-year terms who could use funds to buy land or houses and borrow or lend money to homebuyers for the purposes of affordable housing.

Selectman Jon Witten said the trust "has been very successful" in other towns where it acts as an independent arm of the government that has a capped financial ceiling.

Selectmen were concerned that the town could be held accountable if there were any problems with the trust's actions. Before voting on the article, Witten wanted a legal opinion from town counsel that the town could not be held financially responsible for the Trust.